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Lost in the Savage Garden:
A Nihilistic Interpretation of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Angela S. McMullen

December 1999

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Masters of Arts,
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Abstract

Lost in the Savage Garden:

A Nihilistic Interpretation of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*

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University of Nebraska, 1999

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This study examines Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* in light of the nihilist tradition. Nihilism is defined in this study as the absence of meaning. Rice uses vampires to explore problems created through this philosophy that ultimately leaves a void in human existence. In a sense, this study is an exploration of the ways which humanity fails to find an adequate reason to live. Louis begins the exploration by searching for God. Unable to find supernatural answers in his animated state, he falls into spiritual decay. Lestat, however, takes an aggressive approach patterned on Fredrick Nietzsche. By killing God and giving up the search that destroys Louis, Lestat attempts to become the *ubermensche*. Lestat, however, soon discovers that the role of *ubermensche* itself also is meaningless. Other vampires seek meaning in other ways. Marius seeks meaning in art while Gabrielle tries to find a reason to live in nature. Akasha fails to save everyone by imposing her own version of utopia on the society of vampires. In the end, nothing works. Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* suggest that there really no meaning to human existence. Humans are ultimately lost in a savage garden.

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Preface

“We have invented happiness”
—says the last man, and they blink.

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 6.

Every novelist begins with a controlling philosophy of life. Thomas Hardy struggled to reconcile the scientific outlook with the spiritual, eventually coming to the conclusion that everyone should create a personalized philosophy out of his own experiences. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov believed that objectivity was the key to reaching the truth. Joseph Conrad believed that the human story was always tragic because no redemption existed after death (Glicksberg, *Literature and Religion* 172). Franz Kafka was dominated by the question of "why men live" and how individuals go on living without solving the riddle of life (173). Theodore Dreiser sought to uncover clues that would open up the universe in his

novels. These concepts penetrate these authors' work, giving substance to the story's plot. Anne Rice's controlling philosophy comes out of the nihilist tradition which she incorporates into her *Vampire Chronicles*.

Nihilism is at the heart of Rice's work. The term, however, is difficult to define. "Nihilism" is derived from the Latin term nihil, literally meaning "not anything, nothing: that which does not exist." The same root is found in the verb "annihilate," which means "to reduce to non-existence" (Carr 13). The term "nihilism" emerged during the Enlightenment, but became preeminent in philosophy during the first decade of the nineteenth century when the term was used to criticize transcendental idealism for its tendency to dissolve reality of the external world into nothingness. Although most philosophers criticized this position, Hegel believed that nihilism was "the task of philosophy" because absolute truth came out of nothing (14).

During the second half of the nineteenth century, nihilism became associated with moral, religious, and political anarchism that was grounded in the loss of religious faith. Nietzsche was the father of this perspective. His nihilistic interpretation began with the pronouncement that "God is dead." He argues that once man becomes aware of this he cannot escape the realization that he is the source of ontological meaning and the generator of values. Nietzsche argues that, "the death of God demands from the self-willing man an overcoming of man along with getting rid of God: the 'superman'" (Lowith 28). The problem with modern culture, in Nietzsche's view, is that it suffers from "witty mendacity"

brought about by ancient Christianity built on the remains of Greek culture corrupted by the mythology of the Roman Catholic Church. To overcome the "mendacity of the millennia, "man must, in his view, return to the beginning of Greek philosophy before it became tainted by Roman-Christian beliefs (29).

Although Nietzsche was largely responsible for this interpretation late nineteenth century Russian dissenters called "nihilists" and Russian writers who popularized their ideas brought nihilism to the general public. In *Fathers and Sons* (1862), Turgenev defined a nihilist "as a person who bows to no authority and accepts no doctrine, however widespread, that is not supported by proof" (Glicksberg, *The Literature of Nihilism* 3). Certain problems exist with this belief system because it creates a vacuum of morality and the nihilist is left with free will. Dostoevsky addresses this problem in *The Devils* where Ivan Karamozov states, "If there is no God then everything is permitted" (25).

Rice is not the only writer to exploit angst in modern society. Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, Nicholas Berdyaev's *The End of Time*, and W.H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* all indicate a sense of doom in present culture predicated the loss of faith (Glicksberg, *Literature and Religion* 182). In the 1940s, writers like Sartre once more began to examine the timeless question about God's existence: free will, the nature of good and evil, and what constitutes sin. Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* illustrates the problems of modern intellectuals. Port, the main character, is lost and has an awareness of that void. Reminiscent of Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*, Port ceases to believe in

anything, although he goes off on a quest to prove himself wrong. Eventually, Port refuses to participate in anything because it has no value. Dostoevski's main characters likewise rebel, seeking a solution to the riddle of life. Port asks if life is absurd and God only an illusion, then why not commit suicide as an act of revenge. This is illustrated in Kirillov, the main character in *The Possessed* who commits suicide because he's obsessed with this lack of meaning in the universe. Kirillov's suicide represents his liberation from this void (186).

Although *Interview with a Vampire* appeared in 1976, serious literary investigations began in the 1990s because critics failed to take Rice's work seriously. Katherine Ramsland began literary inquiry by writing a biography on Rice, in which she argues that the real story behind the series involves the author herself. Ramsland maintains that Rice's vampire mythos emerged from Rice's grief over her daughter's death from granulocytic leukemia. Rice, according to Ramsland, used the writing process to work out her own theological crises brought on by this personal tragedy. Most critics accept Ramsland's interpretation, failing to examine other issues.

Sandra Tomc offers a unique interpretation of Rice's use of dieting in her article "Dieting and Damnation: Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*." She argues that Rice created yuppie vampires by relying heavily on 1970s discourses of gender mutability and body transformation, "finding twin paradigms of androgyny and weight loss appropriate for her aims." Throughout the novels, Tomc maintains, Rice's characters are preoccupied with hunger, food, and body

manipulation. She argues that Rice is trying "not just to revise the body but to disown it--to go the route of the 1970s icon Karen Carpenter and diet until you disappear" (97). While writing *Interview with the Vampire*, Rice became obsessed with weight when she gained a few extra pounds. Tomac believes Louis' preoccupation with purity and freedom results from an obsession with food. His main objective is not with evil, but with gaining weight. He substitutes small animals or "the vampires counterpart . . . of celery sticks and Rykrisp[sic] crackers" (100). Louis goes after Claudia because she represents the ideal female body type in Louis' mind because Claudia lacks female characteristics. Tomc's argument adds an insightful perspective into *The Vampire Chronicles*.

Jules Zanger argues that Rice's vampires represent "a democratizing of the metaphoric vampire from Anti-Christ . . . toward the metonymic vampire as social deviant" that began in the 1970s and 1980s (17). Old vampires lived alone whereas new vampires during this period lived in groups. Rice's vampires like others focus more on vampires themselves while human beings become trivialized. In this context, vampires become victims and humans become immaterial making the artificial natural (18). New vampires fill a social space of privilege, wealth, and are attractive and sophisticated. "Vampires are higher on the carnivorous form in the Great Food Chain of Being." Zanger compares the popularity of these new vampires with the emergence of Mafia Doms like John Gotti and Paul Castellano who are "mythical heroes." Like "new vampires," the Mafia's essential relationship is with other Mafia families. Victims are likewise

nameless and faceless. Both are civilized, socialized killers, capable of self-doubt and regret who love both music and flowers (22).

Margaret L. Carter maintains that Rice's vampires represent aliens that became attractive in the 1970s. The success of Rice's vampires, in her view, prospered because of cultural attitudes about the outsiders or aliens. Rice made Lestat a rock singer in *The Vampire Lestat* because "rock singers are symbolic outsiders" who are expected to behave in an outrageous manner (27). Carter maintains that this outsider impulse is part of the human desire to "dream outwards." In *Interview with the Vampire*, this desire is found in the boy interviewer to whom Louis chooses to reveal his past (30). The boy stays because he wants the revelation. Carter compares this to a concept from James Tiptree's short story "And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hillside" (1971). "The yearning to know aliens," says the stranger in the story, "drains the Earth of resources both physical and spiritual, just as the Polynesians lost their own cultural yearning after European technology" (30).

Rice's past, sensuality, food, and alienation are all important parts of *The Vampire Chronicles*. Rice's role as religious scholar, however, also needs to be explored further because it is a significant part of her life. Rice describes her office in the following manner:

Bookcases rise from the floor to the ceiling, full of books on New Age religion, out of body experiences, the archaeology of ancient Sumner, Babylon, Egypt, India, Biblical studies, studies of the Hasidim, every

conceivable translation of the scriptures that I can find in English, books on nihilism, existentialism, Greek art and history, Cassiodorus, Boethius, ghosts and "how to be thin." (Salon 1999)

When Rice wrote *Interview with the Vampire*, she believed God didn't exist, but it "was terribly important to live in spite of that fact" (Ramsland, *Prisms* 150). After that book, she began to believe that God might actually exist but not in a traditional form. She explores this philosophy in her work.

Death is an important theme throughout the *Vampire Chronicles*. "What fascinates me is how a person faces the fact that we're all going to die," says Rice; "I'm interested in how the exceptional person like a vampire copes with that" (Ramsland, *Prisms* 90). The death of Louis' brother Paul led Louis to vampirism in *Interview with the Vampire*. "I cannot live now that he's dead," says Louis. Throughout the text, Louis searches for ways to bring his brother back (144). A cultural crisis has existed since Nietzsche declared God dead and took away death's sacred nature. Rice is not alone in exploring this issue. In the *Wasteland*, T.S. Elliot declares: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust." Death, however, is closely related to time. Elliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" illustrates this fear with the main character measuring out his life with coffee spoons (Glicksberg, *Literature and Religion* 199).

Rice maintains that she is trying to define evil and salvation. She presents a threefold definition of evil: (1) taking another life, (2) deliberate inflicting of suffering on another being, and (3) war (Riley 156). It appears Rice believes that

people are fundamentally evil as exemplified by the intentional infliction of suffering by vampires at the Theatre des Vampires in *Interview with the Vampire*, but she also paradoxically states that people are fundamentally good but are forced to compromise out of necessity (156). Rice resolves this by stating that people have never been able to compromise selfish desires with morality (165). Rice believes in God, but doesn't understand His nature. She believes, however, that He is not concerned about individuals. Salvation, in her view, is obtained in a two-fold way: (1) Don't consciously hurt anyone, and (2) Share your experiences with others (164).

Rice's describes the *Vampire Chronicles* in the following manner:

The Chronicles are about how all of us feel about being outsiders. How we feel that we're really outsiders in a world where everybody else understands something that we don't. It's about our horror of death. It's about how most of us would probably take the blood and be immortal, even if we had to kill. It's about being trapped in the flesh when you have a mind that can soar. It's the human dilemma. What does Yeats says in ["Sailing to Byzantium"]? Consume my heart away; sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying animal." That's what I feel it's really true to. People are shaken by those things. (Deihl 37)

This study examines Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* in light of the nihilist tradition. Chapter one examines *Interview with the Vampire*. This book introduces nihilism as a key term. Rice saw *Interview with the Vampire* as "stepping out of

life so you can better see life. You can see it as a drug experience itself. As religion loses its hold on people, they have to reinvent themselves in terms of new ideas" (Ramsland, *Prisms* 171). The vampire bite is seen as doubt being bestowed on a person who still believes in traditional religion. Armand notices this parallel. He says to Louis, "Everyone else feels as you feel. Your fall from grace and faith has been the fall of the century" (*IV* 325). Further evidence of this is indicated when Daniel drinks blood from Armand and he hears the cries of lost souls. These are the cries of a society who have lost faith in God.

In addition to setting out elements of the nihilistic debate, Rice introduces aspects of her new vampire that are all too human. She describes her vampires as "angels going in the wrong direction" (Ramsland, *Prisms* 146). They are freed from traditional vampire myths of being burned by crucifixes, seeing themselves in mirrors, and some walk in the sunlight. This suggests that her vampires are symbols of something greater than creatures of the night. "Vampires," in Rice's view, "magnify human nature, not only in its capacity for sensory stimulation and eroticism, but also for loneliness, boredom, and vulnerability" (171). Humanity is the bloodsucking monster that walks the night.

Chapter two examines affirmative nihilism in *The Vampire Lestat*. Lestat seeks to overcome doubt and disillusionment through self-fulfillment. He is Nietzsche's *ubermensch* or overman who seeks to transform humans by attempting to get them to grow up through ridding themselves of religious superstitions. Chapter three, in contrast, examines the movement toward utopia

and the relinquishment of freedom to achieve a perfect society. Since utopias attempt to replace one religion with another, it shows how these attempts fail.

Chapter four examines *Tale of the Body Thief*. In this tale, Lestat finds meaning in his own flesh. Rice calls this novel an exploration into the inner psychological workings of her character. Originally, Rice attempted to base it on Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* and the concept of an artificial man. The *Tale of the Body Thief's* meaning is that "History doesn't really help. You always wind up back where you started" (Diehl 38). Although many critics see this novel as a departure from the series, its cohesion exists from forces that work just below the surface.

The series climaxes in the next chapter that examines *Memnoch the Devil*. In this book, Rice questions, "What would God and the devil have to talk about if it weren't for men?" (Gilmore 150). Her philosophy in this text is that traditional religion that presents an omnipotent God does not make sense because of the pain and suffering that exist in the world (153). By traveling to what Lestat thinks is Heaven and Hell, reminiscent of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Lestat revives the dying religion of Christianity by presenting Veronica's Veil to the world via Dora, a human being. This conclusion brings us to the main lesson of the series: "seek and you shall find" and "knock and it shall be opened to you." Unfortunately, we don't always find the answers we want on the other side of the door, and reality itself may destroy us. The final chapter examines Rice's *New Vampire Chronicles*

as a continuation of old nihilistic themes, concluding that no solution exists to the nihilistic debate.

Chapter I

Living in Doubt:

Search For Meaning in *Interview with the Vampire*

Not enough!-- It is not enough to prove something, one also has to seduce or elevate people to it. That is why the man of knowledge should learn how to speak his wisdom: and often in such a way that it sounds like folly!

Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 1.

Interview with the Vampire provides the essential philosophical background for the rest of the *Chronicles*. In a sense, it is Louis' master play. The theme belongs to Louis, the actors say their lines on his world stage. As *The Vampire Lestat* shows, individual perspectives are flawed and tell more about the storyteller than other members of the cast. "Reality constitutes a relationship; man is in the world and apprehends the world; hence there is not one overarching reality but an infinite number of realities, depending on the point of view from which each is seen" (Glücksberg, *Literature and Religion* 62). As Proust

said, reality does not exist independently of the observer (83). For Louis, reality consists of loss and grief over the death of his brother and the nihilistic void that it creates. All characters add to Louis' search for meaning in a meaningless universe.

The human characters in the book are all important because they attempt to infuse their lives with meaning in different ways. Louis' brother Paul seeks in religion meaning. Religious illusions of grandeur, however, eventually drive him insane. Although a vampire, Louis gives Babette the courage to run her plantation, but she falls victim to superstition by believing that Louis is the devil. The Freniere boy finds meaning in honor and tradition by dueling to defend his plantation, which is nonetheless unfulfilling because he gambles the plantation away. The two prostitutes find meaning in stealing from rich customers only to end up disillusioned in a coffin. Louis' human sister finds satisfaction putting flowers on an empty grave on the ruins of Pointe de Luc. This suggests how humans may labor in vain to infuse their lives with meaning.

The vampire's bite is a form of consciousness for the realization that no meaning exists in the universe. This is exemplified in Louis' description of his new ability to see when he became a vampire.

I see as a vampire. . . . It was as if I had only just been able to see colors and shapes for the first time. I was so enthralled with the buttons on Lestat's black coat that I looked at nothing else for a long time. Then Lestat began to laugh, and I heard his laughter as I had never heard

anything before. His heart I still heard like the beating of a drum, and now came this metallic laughter. It was confusing, each sound running into the next sound, like the mingling reverberations of bells, until I had learned to separate the sounds, and then they overlapped, each soft and distinct, increasing but discrete, peals of laughter. (13)

Vampires provide a new way of seeing and addressing specific religious questions. The vampire's bite is thus a means to enlightenment, or sucking illusions from the individual's mind. Louis supports this with the statement that "Killing is no ordinary act" (IV 2). Instead, it may be a means to intellectual discovery.

Louis is termed by Lestat "merciful death" because of his desire not to enlighten others. Unlike Lestat, Louis is an intellectual consumed in his books" (82). He finds satisfaction in art, but longs for his former self. He represents a person consumed by his desire for morality. Nietzsche maintained that "morality is a hindrance to the development of new and better customs: it makes stupid" (Glicksberg, *Literature and Religion*, 2). Realizing this, Lestat tells Louis that what lies before him is the extinction of religious illusions from individuals, and that his search for innocence is flawed. When accosting a child on the street, Louis tells him to "[p]ass by fast," saving the child from metaphysical destruction (IV 126). At the end of *Interview with the Vampire*, the baby symbolizes innocence. Louis weeps for the innocence he once had. By placing the child in its crib, Louis

returns it to blissful ignorance. This may suggest that humans should not seek to understand the world in which they live.

Pointe de Luc seems a Garden of Eden. Rice believes that plantations are unapproachable paradises, embodying worlds unto themselves (*JV* 351).

Symbolically, Pointe de Luc is a haven of religious illusion. In this state of perfection, Louis has doubts because of his own brother's religious insanity and he loses his faith making him vulnerable to a new belief system. Lestat wants Louis' plantation because it is Eden. Louis is vulnerable because he no longer believes in religion. The priest maintains that Louis' brother was possessed. At the end of the novel, instead of going back to New Orleans, Louis goes to San Francisco to give his interview, knowing all along that it is futile. Louis asks Lestat if Louis "could return" to his former state indicating his desire to return to innocence (87). Louis, at the end of the novel, goes to San Francisco instead of New Orleans to give his interview knowing that he cannot return to Eden.

Claudia is an important character. She, however, is unable to become physically whole because her body is never allowed to mature like her mind. They want her to remain forever a child to provide meaning in their insignificant lives, but she too quickly becomes faithless (*Ramsland, VC* 107). Her anger at both Lestat and Louis occurs because they both knew about the nihilistic horror that plagues humanity and created her anyway. This suggests humanity's anger at God. Claudia's search for meaning leads her to look toward becoming physically mature and then finally death as a solution to her meaningless

existence. In Paris, Claudia wears rings and seductive dresses, thinking that physical maturity is equal to happiness. She kills two servants who were mother and daughter, leaving them to decay, representing her own lack of mental development. Before her destruction, Armand gives her an escape by providing her with an adult body in *The Vampire Armand*. Claudia, however, realizes in the end that even her desire to grow up was meaningless. And all that remains is nothingness.

Claudia begins to question her existence and her way of life. Unlike Louis, she can't accept having no answers. Louis "infected" her with nihilistic concepts by teaching her to see with "vampire eyes" or to look at the world without the existence of a Divine Being (IV 113). She actively seeks to find answers by reading books like Ancius Manlius Severinus Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, written while he was in prison, questioning why God allows good people to suffer as Boethuis did and evil people to prosper. Louis says that he took Claudia's life or meaning in the world while Lestat gave it back to her in the form of a new religion, one based on pleasures of the flesh. After a while, this religion based on "pleasure" proves to be unfulfilling and she hungers for more when she realizes that Lestat has no answers.

You know nothing. . . And suppose the vampire who made you knew nothing, and the vampire who made that vampire knew nothing, and the vampire before him knew nothing, and so it goes back and back, nothing

proceeding from nothing, until there is nothing! And we must live with the knowledge that there is no knowledge. (120)

This leads to a "constant never-ending search for something," a search in which all humans participate (125). Like Nietzsche, Claudia kills Lestat, or the God of the old religion, to find the reality that lies beyond the old superstition. Both she and Louis discover that what remains is simply one illusion covering another.

Lestat resembles the Marquis De Sade in his attitude toward God, good, and evil. Lestat appears to bear a personal, vindictive hatred of God. Sade maintained that if God exists, He must be the worst of all criminals. He believed that the supernatural only diverts humans from their true ability to plumb the depths of human vice. In a world without values, a person should be free to follow a person's own pleasures. His maxim was that the greater the pleasure, the greater the value. The problem is, however, that pleasure eventually becomes banal and meaningless.

Lestat also takes on the characteristics of a MacBeth, seeking power but sinking in a sea of meaninglessness. His ambition is evident in his attempt to start his own coven and make slaves out of Louis and Claudia. Lestat drags Louis to see every performance and afterwards he repeats the lines "Tomorrow and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow." In different ways, the play repeatedly asks what it means to be a man. Lestat is obsessed with shadows; the word "shadow" is repeated constantly throughout this book recalling Shakespeare's image of a walking shadow. Lestat feels pride in his vampirism, but recognizes that he is

only a "shadow" of his former self and that he is merely a "poor player" strutting and fretting, powerless to achieve anything of serious importance. Lestat is caught up in his own nightmare, a nightmare that all humanity shares.

The search for answers brings Claudia and Louis to the birthplace of the myth of vampires. In a monastery, they find a vampire which symbolizes a new religion or belief system. This creature represents a belief system that has "[n]o secrets, no truths, only despair" (96). It is chaotic and reeks of death. Louis calls the vampire "nothing more than a mindless reanimated corpse." Claudia and Louis find the emergence of similar false beliefs throughout Eastern Europe. Claudia believes that these new religions came into existence through humanity's thirst for meaning. In despair, humans lose their minds, clinging to anything that may signify that they are important.

Claudia and Louis' search for meaning brings them to the Theatre des Vampires. Humans guard the theatre to protect the illusions that exist inside. The play at the Theatre shows the randomness of death and illusions that hide this fact. Armand is a prime example of how things are not what they seem. Although he has a sweet face, Armand maintains that he is "evil with infinite gradations" (IV 162). Instead of mercifully killing a decrepit old woman who seeks release from frailty, the grim reaper kills a young woman. To her, the vampire says, "We are death," indicating she is like the core of humans who die day after day (221). Armand is a vampire who has lost feeling, empty inside, lacking substance because he has no values to cling to. He finds his victims among those who

desire death or people who have lost their faith. When Louis leaves with Armand, Louis tells him that he showed Louis "the only thing [he] could hope to become," which is little more than a reanimated corpse.

Louis believes that he will find answers from Armand because Armand is the oldest vampire. In contrast, Armand seeks Louis because Louis still laments his lack of faith. "The only answer that exists is inside ourselves," says Armand (IV 125). Their meeting ends in death and loss. Claudia dies in the fire. Louis' is an emotional death, and Lestat goes into the ground. Louis responds that he had always known that only death exists and that humanity is hopeless. The trinity of Louis, Claudia, and Lestat shatters and nothing exists. "If God doesn't exist," Louis declares, "we are the creatures of the highest consciousness of the universe. We alone understand the passage of time and the value of every minute of heaven. And what constitutes evil, real evil, is the taking of a single human life." "If nothing exists," Louis reasons, "then human life is all we have" (IV 371). And since human life is meaningless, we have nothing.

Interview with the Vampire seeks to plumb philosophical questions that evade simple answers. At the heart of the novel is the question of God's existence. Sartre said that we are condemned to be free (Salon 1999). In *Interview with the Vampire*, this freedom leads to spiritual death. Louis, however, is dead in the beginning. His quest was for a life-sustaining philosophy. Unwilling to accept a "noble lie" based on irrationality, Louis has no choice but to give in to his own spiritual death.

Chapter II

The *Übermensch* in *The Vampire Lestat*

"I say unto you: one must still
have chaos in oneself to be able
to give birth to a dancing star."

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 4.

After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave--a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we--we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 108.

"Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman--a rope over an abyss"--wrote Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (3). Humanity's struggle with its identity is an old tale that grew up in the caves where man's ancestors once dwelled. A certain pride and resentment in being different from other animals have been continuous parts of the human psyche. Lestat emerged in the 1700s when the Enlightenment was in full bloom and religious beliefs were crumbling. Nihilism likewise came into being. Ideas of the Enlightenment gave rise to

nihilism. Most intellectuals agreed that man was alone in the universe, but the transitory nature of human life caused problems as it always has for the "thinking animal." Nietzsche came to humanity's rescue in the 1800s by proclaiming that God was dead, and it really didn't matter because man has potential for greatness on his own terms. The overman who emerges when a person with superior potential masters himself and strikes off conventional Christian "herd mentality" to create his own values became the avenue, in Nietzsche's view, for reaching this goal. Lestat takes this form as he journeys from Nicholas, Gabrielle, Armand, and Marius. Each represents how humans cope with their meaningless existence.

Lestat identifies most with Dionysus, the Greek God of wine, revelry, and drunkenness. Dionysus dies in the myth from female followers tearing him apart. The last section of *The Vampire Lestat* is titled "Dionysus in San Francisco" which shows the scene of Lestat being met by female followers and vampires who have the intent to tear him apart. In *Interview with the Vampire*, Claudia hacks him to pieces with a knife and he calls this a repetition of the "same old theme: the god dies. And the god rises. But this time no one is redeemed" (502). This theme is also echoed in Lestat's music. In the "Age of Innocence," he calls for humans to vanquish false gods and to destroy the vampire, the embodiment of evil. "Kill us," he sings. "[B]rothers and sisters / The war is on" (541). This echoes Nietzsche's pronouncement in *The Gay Science* that "God is dead." To humans, Lestat becomes a visible god whose lyrics like "The Legacy of Magnus,"

"The Children of Darkness," and "Those Who Must Be Kept" reveal sacred vampire lore. This lore, however, is meaningless.

Like Dionysus, Lestat finds his freedom in the theatre, which he respects because actors make their own reality, remaining unhindered by traditional societal norms. Lestat takes on the name Lelio, which is associated with solar power, strength of will, and a clear penetrating light showing God-like qualities to highlight human potential. He has this part when first he joins a wandering troupe of Italian actors that appears when he is sixteen. He describes himself as being "in raptures watching it" (33). In Paris, he later fills the same role on the stage at Renald's theatre. In this role, he anticipates what he will become by making himself up in white makeup with reddened lips, his new form for the ages. In the *Theatre des Vampires*, Armand is attempting to imitate Lestat (Ramsland, VC 248). Unlike Lestat, Armand can't live without faith.

"[C]an men live without beliefs?" is the main question in the book (47). Lestat tells Nicholas that no one in his family believes in God, which is typical among the eighteenth-century aristocracy. Lestat believes that the world will be a better place if people never kill in the name of religion. Religious differences are highlighted in the story about the witches that involves "the old tale" of religious persecution in which the innocent witches "all died for nothing" (48). This suggests that religion has a negative connotation in the book. After becoming a vampire, Lestat no longer cares about the nature of God. He calls the creator "part of some dull and dreary realm whose secrets had long been plumbed,

whose light has long ago gone out" (80). Lestat thus concedes that God might exist.

Gabriella, however, searches for meaning in different areas. Humans are of little interest to her. Instead, she prefers to "study the currents of the wind or the patterns of the falling leaves" (253). Her goal is "to know . . . why nature continues to contrive it, and what is the link between the life of a lightning storm with the feelings these things inspire us" (288). Gabriella symbolizes the Great Earth Mother who brings both life and death. She tells Lestat on leaving him that she will be "a goddess to those I slay," thereby completing the lifecycle (Smith 59). In doing so, she may represent the transcendental attempt to find God in nature.

Nicholas, in contrast, is a person who ceases to believe in anything and seeks suicide as a means of liberation. Lestat describes Nicholas' tragedy as his belief in justice or the idea that good would be rewarded and evil would be punished. As Boethius discovered, the reverse is usually true. Nicholas attempts to find meaning in the Theatre des Vampires by making it the focal point of his existence. But this is only a temporary solution. Nicholas plays the violin for the purpose of his own freedom. He accompanies Lestat to Paris because he believes they might meet their deaths. Nicholas asks Lestat what it means for the "murderous monster filled with light" to go on existing (266). While making Nicholas a vampire, Lestat has a vision of a bird "sailing on the darkness over the barren shore, the seamless sea" (238). Nicholas tries to make other vampires or

share his tragic vision with the world, so he must be restrained to stop infection of the masses. Nicholas goes into the fire in a Sabbath ceremony asserting his freedom from divine will. This is the fulfillment of Armand's prophecy that the dark trick or sharing enlightenment with others will result only in unhappiness. Individuals are ultimately alone in life's tragedy.

Armand is equally important. In the beginning, he finds meaning in his relationship with Marius. Armand finds "[l]ove and love and love in the vampire kiss" which he describes as "everything" (292). Love, however, fails to sustain him because Marius deserts him. In this state of disillusionment, Armand is "captured" by traditional religious tenets that fill the vacuum left by Marius' departure. He accepts his role in the divine scheme of things as evil and kills indiscriminately. Santino, the messiah, provides scripture that all vampires must follow, including a version of the Ten Commandments. Armand plays the Apostle Paul traveling and creating different covens. Like Santino, Armand also fails to find happiness in the coven.

When Armand tells Gabrielle that God abandoned them, she asks him, "Do you believe in God?" To which Armand replies, "Yes, always in God. . . . It is Satan 'our master' who is the fiction and that is the fiction which has betrayed me" (310). Armand chastises Lestat for breaking up their coven. He says, "I could speak until the end of the world . . . I could never tell you what you destroyed here" (224). He continues, stating that "The things that bond us together, gave us strength to endure these damned things! The mysteries that

protected us are here" (225). He goes to Nicholas' old apartment, going through old books not necessarily to connect to the age, but to try to understand what gives Lestat his unique position.

In his quest for knowledge, Lestat seeks out Marius, the archetypal wise teacher (Ramsland, VC 280). Marius agrees to speak to him because he admires Lestat's inquisitiveness:

Very few beings seek knowledge in this world. Mortal or immortal, few really ask. On the contrary, they try to wring from the unknown the answers that they have already shaped in their minds--justifications, confirmations, forms of consolation without which they can't go on. To really ask is to open the door to the whirlwind. The answer may annihilate the question and the questioner. (380)

Nietzsche eventually went insane in his endless search for meaning. Marius is created "at the end of an era" of unprecedented changes (VL 333). During this time, old gods fell and Christianity emerged within the Roman Empire. "It has taken eighteen hundred years to come back to skepticism, the level of practicality." He points out that this is not simply history repeating itself but opening up the door so that something new can be created. "We sprang up from a crack between faith and despair, as it were," he says (382). They were both chosen for immortality for the same reason: "that we were the nonpareils of our blood and blue-eyed race, that we were taller and more finely made than other

men" (384). Beauty as a criterion is just as good for eternity as any other when the world lacks meaning.

Although Lestat ends this book on a positive note, the seeds of his own destruction have been planted. The noble idea that humanity will rise above the nihilistic void briefly inspires, but eventually destroys, that which it originally inflamed. Nicholas knew this better than anyone. His death was about liberation, not surrender. But since nothing exists but the escape of one void to another, he has ultimately just changed his position. Gabrielle finds comfort in nature, and appears to be the sanest vampire of the bunch. Armand is lost in a religious lie and reflects this lie perfectly in his inability to reveal the truth as he knows it. And Marius gives in to the notion that the future emerges in this nihilistic environment. Lestat believes that the death of all vampires or religious thoughts will liberate man. But in the end, all these avenues fail in the nihilistic landscape because life ultimately means nothing.

Chapter III

Hell on Earth:

Utopian Quest for Perfection in Queen of the Damned

“Oh brave new world, that has such people”

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act. V, sc. 1, line 184.

In *The Vampire Lestat*, Marius says that, "the mind of each man is a Savage Garden . . . in which all manner of creations rise and fall, and anthems are some things imagined that must finally be condemned and disavowed" (468). Rice introduces a utopian perspective in her search for meaning in a world that is meaningless. Nietzsche maintained that the price for losing religious certainty is that, "[w]e are losing the center of gravity that allows each of us to live; we are lost in time" (Carr 41). Akasha attempts to impose her own view of the world on the earth to bring about a "happiness" that is non-existent in the face of freedom. Like Huxley in *Brave New World* and Eugene Zamyatin in *We*, Rice adopts

Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor (*The Brothers Karamazov*.) Nicholas Berdyazv wrote that utopian "thought is profoundly inherent in human nature: man wounded by the evil of the world, inevitably evokes an image of a perfect, harmonious social order where he will be happy." Utopias, in his view, are realizable, but their perfection is destroyed in their creation (90). In *Slavery and Freedom*, he notes that

Utopias seem very much more realizable than we had formally supposed. And now we find ourselves facing a question, which is painful in a new kind of way: How to avoid their actual realization? . . . Utopias are realizable. Life moves toward a utopia. And perhaps a new age is beginning, an age in which the intellectuals and the cultivated class will dream of methods of avoiding utopia and of returning to a society that is non-utopian, that is less "perfect" and more free. (Elliot 89)

Vampires eventually destroy Akasha and her dream of utopia only to replace it with a new ideology based on future enlightenment. The story ends with Lestat's realization that "the human in me is closer to the surface than ever" (QD 11). Lestat's humanity is weak and vulnerable, and easily succumbs to mortality.

Akasha's plan is amazingly simple: kill ninety-nine percent of the males who are responsible for inflicting evils in society. The fact that she is a female vampire who kills indiscriminately to enact her plan shows in itself that females are also capable of great violence. This type of discrimination is similar to Hitler's belief that all Germany's ills are based on the Jewish population, and the belief

that exterminating them would result in the extinction of Germany's problems. This type of violence continues into the present with "ethnic cleansing" in Serbia and in militant groups in the United States like the skinheads. This is reminiscent of what Nietzsche saw as the violence that erupts from trying to impose a belief system or a solitary way of looking at the world on a population (Carr 23). By forcing her belief on others, Akasha is perpetuating a belief system that ultimately will enslave all people.

Rice takes a different perspective in this work. "[W]e will all jump as a thousand . . . writers have done into the brains and souls of 'many characters'" (QD 6). Her technique reflects Berdyar's view that "man lives in a fragmented world, but dreams of an integrated world" (Elliot 90). Rice does this visually to show the essence of all utopias, which is the quest for wholeness that destroys human freedom. The first part of Akasha's goal is to destroy vampires and their meetinghouses or intellectuals who created the environment resulting from nihilistic thought. Multiple voices continue to multiply throughout the text showing Utopia's failure because wholeness is an artificial construct.

In the first part of the book, Rice presents stories of Lestat's vampire friends and supporters. They are people who are too weak to stand on their own two feet. These are "types" that are excluded from Akasha's vision of perfection. Baby Jenks represents lost teenagers in our society in the backdrop of the breakup of traditional families. She hangs around with a motorcycle gang that serves as a surrogate family. Pandora, another female vampire, represents the

inability of people to connect with others in modern society. Jolted by a failed relationship with Marius, she no longer cares about anything. Her pain makes her oblivious to events around her. Daniel is the male counterpart to Pandora. He finds meaning in a destructive relationship with Armand who abuses him and forces him into violent situations. Akasha's union excludes these people from her program.

Daniel and Armand participate in the great debate about meaning. Armand tells Daniel that he fears that after death only "chaos" exists. "Imagine drifting half in and out of consciousness, trying vainly to remember who you are or what you were." Daniel, himself, says that these words frightened him because "[s]omething about them rang true" (*QD* 89). Daniel mentions the human dilemma when he argues with Armand about his life. "You'll never die, and yet you watch me die, night after night" (102). After Armand makes Daniel a vampire, they move toward their destiny. This indicates that something greater than Armand and Daniel is pulling the strings.

Jesse is another important character because she brings the rules of the Talamanca to light, a link between vampires and mortals. This organization does not require that its members believe in anything, emphasizing instead honesty and careful observation. Truth is found in the empirical. Jesse is in the "womb" of the Talamanca. Death is a part of life in this group. David believes that the elders who give him his directives have ulterior motives. Evil, in this organization, is described as "what is destructive to mankind" (288). This evil includes nihilism.

"All utopias are fed from the sources of mythology; the social engineer's blueprints are merely revisited editions of ancient texts" (Elliot 3). Rice includes vampire mythology to draw it into the fold of utopias. The section discussing vampire mythology is called, "As it was in the beginning, Is, Now, and Ever Shall Be," indicating the continuity in this trend. Rice's mythology involves the tale of the twins who are raped and humiliated under the Egyptian King and Queen over 6,000 years ago because Egyptians thought their way of life was superior to the twins' civilization.

The reality behind their situation is a tale of two cities that have different practices. The weaker nation is communal and practices cannibalism of the dead to preserve the spirit. The King and Queen live in Kemet, a word that refers to the black soil of the Nile (Ramsland, VC 237). They are jealous of the good witches who inherit their mother's special abilities to contact spirits in nature who live in harmony because this association infuses the afterlife with meaning. Akasha and Enkil summon the witches to appear before their court where Akasha demands to know about their special powers so that she too can have something to believe in. Maharet describes their civilization as peaceful and harmonious: "Ours was a land of serenity and belief, of laden fruit trees and fields of wild wheat free for anyone to cut with the scythe. Ours was a land of green grass and cool breezes" (QD 288). In contrast, Akasha's realm is artificial. Maharet describes a "sprawling city of brick buildings with glass roofs, of great temples and palaces built of the same coarse materials, but all very fine" (QD 298). The people of their realm also

have an element of artificiality to them. "All their painted eyes tended to unnerve us. For they hardened their stare; it gave an illusion of depth where perhaps there was no depth; instinctually we shrank from this artifice" (299).

Akasha sees setting up a utopia as a resolution to solving human problems. Marius disagrees with Akasha's plan saying that the human race is evolving towards something better, thereby reiterating Nietzsche's belief that Christianity is responsible for the evils of society. He believes that vampires have no right to interfere in human destiny. Instead of providing people with a new belief system, they should let civilization undergo a collapse in values so that it could emerge into another aspect of civilization. Marius reminds her that in her new religion people will still be worshipping "superstitious lies." "Have we not had enough of them? And now, of all times, when the world's waking from its old delusions. When it has thrown off the old gods" (QD 406). Nietzsche said that by giving up illusions, humanity can see the world as it is. Utopia, however, survives by the vampires eating Akasha's brain and heart. This means that this cycle will no doubt be repeated.

Queen of the Damned is about the human drive toward utopia and its gradual collapse under the realities of human existence. Akasha wanted perfection at a high price--the death of ninety-nine percent of the male race, excluding individuals who are a necessary part of the human community. Akasha misplaced the source of evil as coming from the male part of the population

instead of realizing that it is a part of the human psyche. She lives by violence and is destroyed by violence earning her the title *Queen of the Damned*.

Chapter IV:

The Tiger in the Forest

Mephistopheles and Lestat in *Tale of the Body Thief*

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forest of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry!

William Blake, "The Tyger"

The Tale of the Body Thief involves Lestat's search for meaning by turning inward. In this novel, Rice begins to question Nietzsche's theory that God is dead by including divine interference that may or may not be the devil. He is haunted by dreams of Claudia, whom he could not save from the earth. The Faustian theme of selling one's soul to the devil to discover higher truths is central to this novel. But equally important is Nietzsche's concept of "eternal recurrence" or the idea that everything keeps repeating. Regardless of who Lestat is, whether vampire or human, he is still caught up in the cycle of meaningless. David and

Lestat repeatedly read copies of Faust's book, Gretchen is a character in it, and the compact made between Lestat and James repeats this motif. In his case, it's for Lestat to be human by switching bodies with Riglan James, the devil's temporary personae. Although the original agreement was only for a temporary changes, James runs off with the vampire's body forcing Lestat as a mortal to pursue his own vampire body. From this literal search for himself, Lestat realizes that he loves being a vampire, but this fails to provide him with satisfaction.

Riglan James appears to be the devil in disguise. He is claiming that he can do the impossible: switch bodies, which is beyond anyone else's capabilities. The big question on how James continually manages to find Lestat is never satisfactorily answered. Riglan claims that he located him by looking at his alias, looking for predictable patterns, which also gives Lestat and David the means of locating James on the Queen Elizabeth II. Lestat realizes this is "an act" (128). When he talks about the Talamanca, he says that James tried to bargain with them, but they refused. He tells Lestat to "act quickly" because he realizes that Lestat will see through his scheme if he ponders it long enough (131). He tells Lestat that body switching is "a miracle" that only they can partake of (132). "Every breath you take is stolen! Oh yes, I must have your body. I must experience this" (136). He says that "For you, the test will be the courage, nothing more" (121). James tells Lestat the Talamanca "should have studied," perhaps suggesting that James has secret knowledge (129).

Like Faust at the beginning of the tale, Lestat is bored with his vampire existence and desires mortality. Lestat is targeted for this Divine intervention because Lestat is "a faithful seeker after truth who will never turn away from his goal." In this role, Lestat is Faust, Job, and Adam. Lestat's main purpose is to test the belief that "[b]eing mortal was what we all wanted, that we were sorry that we'd given it up, that immortality wasn't worth the loss of our human souls" (BT 233). He attempts suicide unsuccessfully by flying into the sun. Lestat sees himself as a vigilante because he killed mostly thieves, murders, and serial killers. After killing an innocent old woman, however, he begins to see himself for what he is: a cold-blooded murderer. Lestat sees his own damnation as irreversible, regardless of how many "good acts" he does. "The evil of one murder is infinite, my guilt is like my beauty--eternal. I cannot be forgiven, for there is no one to forgive me for what I've done" (14). Lestat first tries to free himself by going into the sun. In this state of boredom mixed with despair, Raglan James approaches him with an irresistible proposition to switch bodies so that Lestat can be mortal. Like Mephistopheles, James entices Lestat by daring him to be human again instead of being "Cain forever seeking the blood of his brother" (197). After making the switch, James runs off with Lestat's body.

David Talbot is an important character in this novel because he helps Lestat recover his body. Although he realizes that Lestat wants to make him a vampire, he stands by Lestat throughout the tale. Being old and realizing that he will soon die, he sees Lestat as one of his few chances to have life so that he can

accomplish all that he desires to do. Yet, he is unwilling to sell his soul in the bargain. David does not want to continue in a state of meaninglessness. He advises Lestat against making the switch, but Lestat fails to listen to him. Lestat believes that he will find meaning by becoming somebody else. Although Talbot wants vampirism, he cannot accept it because it challenges his own vision of his belief of what is good.

James flees with Lestat's body with the intent of keeping it forever. He murders Lestat's New York agent and attempts to access Lestat's files to access his wealth. By discovering one of Lestat's aliases, James obtains twenty million dollars, but he is unsuccessful at cracking the rest of his codes. James' downfall is that he kills in certain patterns that give his locations away. Lestat discovers that he is traveling on the *Queen Elizabeth 2*, a ship which he once was a crewmember on with his father. Rice uses a connection of Gothic names like Sebastian Melmoth, Stanford Wilde, Dr. Stoker, and Sheridan Blackwood on board this ship. James was fired for theft. Perhaps out of revenge for being terminated, James books a passage as Jason Hamilton. The struggle becomes great when James manages to kick the soul out of David's body. Lestat is unaware that they have switched bodies and James attempts to manipulate Lestat into giving him the dark gift. He fails because he cannot hold up the images. James dies in David's body in a hospital.

In the beginning, Lestat first thinks of the advantages of being human. "The truth was," he said, "I'd envisioned . . . a vanity of pleasures--eating,

drinking, a woman in my bed, then a man" (119). Lestat, however, soon realizes that the pleasures of the flesh are transitory. Because of his inexperience, he accidentally rapes a waitress who had invited him home. He enjoys control and taking her at will, but realizes that he must hold back his animal desires. He believes that it is a localized feeling that consumes his thoughts although it is over too soon. He hates the earthy nature of the act along with its scents, sweat, stickiness, and the need for prophylactics. He believes that the corporeal pleasure is dismal and minimal.

Gretchen is chosen in this plot because she always sought to do "something hard" and to take risks. Lestat realizes that her "drive is in utter self-sacrifice" (245). She is a nursing nun on leave from a mission in South America where she works at a hospital. Throughout her life, she prays for the miracle of stigmata that is reserved only for those of great faith. In her youth, she gave up playing the piano to "serve Him in a special way" (247). Like Gretchen in Faust, Mephistopheles cares little about her because he cannot have her soul. James' purpose is to destroy Faust by helping him sink into lust and fornication while being responsible for Gretchen's ruin. Lestat is the one destined for divine intervention. Lestat's epiphany from this adventure is:

My greatest sin has always been that I have a wonderful time being myself. My guilt is always there; my moral abhorrence for myself is always there; but I have a good time[;] . . . you see that's the core of the dilemma

for me—how can I enjoy being a vampire so much, how can I enjoy it if it's evil? (BT 303)

He admits, "There had been the opportunity for salvation--and I said no" (BT 430). This shows that Lestat has ultimately rejected Christianity.

An interpretation of Blake's poem may "The Tyger" may present another of the novel's essential themes. "More intelligence went into the creation of that old poem than ever went into the creation of the world," said David (123). Evidence exists in this novel that God may actually exist, and is responsible for evil in the world as well as good. To Lestat, it's easy to see how God created the lamb but not the tiger. This poem argues that until we face the realities of our lives, we cannot really know who we are because of humanity's tendency to live under an illusion. Throughout the *Chronicles*, Lestat has often wondered how a good God could have created an evil creature such as himself. Like Blake, Lestat provides no answer (Ramsland 36). Blake reflects the beauty in the savage beasts that reflects Lestat. "Tyger, Tyger, burning bright / In the forests of the night" (Blake 32). This reflects the hunting ground that the vampire wanders in. The poem appears in Blake's collection called *Songs of Experience* reflecting the knowledge that meaning does not exist in the world regardless of what role a person plays.

Lestat quotes the poem because he has been reading David Talbot's mind. David has been dreaming about shooting a tiger that is threatening him. David recalls the image of the tyger seeing himself as a dangerous entity that

threatens to leap at David's throat at any minute. He tells David that he saw him kill the animal in his dream when he sees the tiger skin on the floor, telling him that he has to shoot the tiger because it is a child killer. Because of his guilt over making Claudia a vampire, Lestat desires to gain the illusion of innocence he once had as a vampire to become like the lamb. Innocence, for him, is bought through a deal with the Riglan James, the infamous body thief.

Lestat becomes a transformed individual in this novel; such a change as indicated in W. B. Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium." Rice initially wanted to call this book "Once Out of Nature," a line from the poem. The poem seeks to evade the impermanence of the present world by escaping into a separate world of art. This theme is developed through contrasts between youth and age, physicality and spirituality, life and art, and mortal life and eternal existence. The poem concerns the eventual demise that awaits "whatever is begotten, born, and dies." Although the bird sings "sensual music" praising the natural process of procreation, birth, and death. The narrator prefers "monuments of unaging intellect." The poem combines all aspects "Of what is past, or passing, or to come." The artificial bird (a work of art) in the poem cares little about passing generations. Byzantium is a place where "religious, aesthetic and practical life were one." The narrator wants "God's holy fire" to consume his flesh and free his soul from "every tatter in its mortal dress" (Yates 1). This shows Lestat's growing despair with life, and his inability to find a center.

The Tale of the Body Thief reveals the protagonist's final preparation before he moves on to the greatest adventure of his life that will revive religion and leave him dangling in a state of uncertainty. In this tale, the devil plays the role of Riglan James tempting Lestat with mortality in the jungle or savage garden where Lestat hunts. This novel shows that Lestat can be bought if the price is right. In addition, Lestat becomes strong once again playing the role of brat prince. His defiance will be the key ingredient for the conclusion of the plan to revitalize religion and propagate the Cain and Abel theme of brother killing brother for theological reasons. But at this point, Lestat sees only what he has gained instead of realizing all that is lost.

Chapter V

Lost in the Savage Garden:

Zarathustra Caught in the Grips of Fate in *Memnoch, the Devil*

He who binds himself to joy
Does the winged life destroy
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.

William Blake, "Eternity"

In the final *Vampire Chronicle* in Rice's original vampire series, Lestat is caught up in a scheme between God and the devil to reinvigorate Christianity in *Memnoch the Devil*. It's a different Lestat from the rest of the *Chronicles*. He tells his readers in the prologue to "Come with me. Just listen to me. Don't leave me," indicating that something horrendous has happened (*MD* 1). In the beginning, Lestat walks toward a victim, and in the end, he walks away from all victims. Events become complete and the tales that have been woven are finished. This story is a mix between Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Playing Virgil to Lestat's Dante, Memnoch guides Lestat through Heaven and Hell. In the end, Lestat is no longer his old self--he

has seen too much. His newly found humanity makes him victim to the greatest con of all by creatures who call themselves Devil and God in a plan to revive Christianity.

The devil apparently has been a constant force throughout the Chronicles. In *Interview with the Vampire* and *Queen of the Damned*, the devil may exist just below the surface. In *The Vampire Lestat*, *Tale of the Body Thief*, and *Memnoch, the Devil* the devil makes an actual appearance. In the *Vampire Lestat*, the devil may take the form of Magnus who is described as a deeply lined, smiling white face at Renaud's House of Thespians where Lestat is performing. While waiting for Lestat, he plays with victims, keeping them in a pen symbolizing how life is really out of our control. This shows that evil is always around us.

Creatures that may be God and the devil actively pursue Lestat. This begins when the Devil, impersonating Roger's ghost, provides the initial contact with Dora Flynn, an evangelist who can publicize a religious icon. The Devil plays with Lestat by stalking him as the vampire pursues his victims. In addition, the Devil takes on the name Memnoch, perhaps illustrating the flippant nature of these supernatural beings who take pleasure in playing games in the mortal realm. He requests that the vampire help him save humanity from an evil God who causes humans unnecessary suffering. So that he can make his point, Memnoch requests that Lestat accompany him from Heaven to Hell. Setting up the rules, Memnoch cautions, "it's terribly important that you see everything before you make up your mind" (168). This gives both him and God time to set Lestat up. The devil reintegrates Nietzsche's argument that Christian evil that has been perpetuated throughout history. Lestat, in this story, becomes easy prey to his own preconceptions.

David Talbot, however, is their first intended victim. While sitting in a Paris café after the war, David tells Lestat that he saw God and the Devil having a conversation in human form. Satan was telling God that he was sick of doing evil deeds. God, however, reassured him that his role was vital in the universe. The Devil, David realizes, is a good friend of God's and that the world is simply an experiment. This leads him to the conclusion that the devil can change and that God is imperfect. It appears God incorporated His own flaws into the universe, which He made

through simple cell division. David concludes that they wanted him to witness their conversation. Instead of pursuing some course of action, he simply was led by others to doubt his vision. When Lestat asks the devil about his purpose for David, Memoch tells him that it is unimportant because Lestat is "the one that [the devil] wants now" (*MD* 168).

Rice's devil is one in a long line of literary creations of Satan. The Satan in *Paradise Lost* is most well-known. Milton shows that the misuse of free will given to the angels and to humankind was the cause of all subsequent punishment and disaster. Dante's *Inferno* presents an alternative picture. He is without magnificence or aggression. The evil which he portrays is a true horror, the negation of all creativity and life-giving force. After standing up to God, Lucifer's body falls head-first from Heaven and plunges through the earth to its center, where he remains immobile, head downwards, trapped in frozen ice.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "Ethan Brand" (1850) may provide important insights into why Lestat has become a target. The main character in the story has done unspeakable things to a local girl and has reached an understanding with the Devil as Lestat did in *Tale of the Body Thief*. The unpardonable sin, however, involves the sin of intellectual pride that results in the undertaking of the search for the Unpardonable Sin. The overweening ambition turns Brand's heart to stone. Brand believes that this quest would serve humanity and bring him some form of reward and satisfaction. Like Brand, curiosity and pride blinded Lestat. And Brand like Lestat could only return to his starting place and destroy himself by leaping into the inferno that inspired his nocturnal meditations on evil (Ramsland, *VC* 125).

Several events occur that foreshadow events in the novel. While stalking Roger, Lestat notices that he is being stalked by an unknown force. Lestat says to David that Lestat did not feel evil from this creature that calls himself Memnoch. This describes the things that lead Lestat to this adventure that will ultimately leave him in a state of confusion. While watching Roger and Dora outside a church, he hears a piece of *Phantom of the Opera* based on Gaston Leroux's novel that is about a man who is physically deformed who gains a reputation for being a ghost. Through his talent for music, he lures a beautiful woman named Christina into his lair. When she

unmasks him, she realizes that he can offer her nothing and she departs. This tale may foreshadow Lestat's eventual seduction by the underworld figure along with his own deformity (Ramslund, VC 347).

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Memnoch provides him with the opportunity to journey into Heaven to meet God. When they enter Heaven, Lestat sees a tall, dark-haired man engulfed in light. Lestat believes that He is

suffering. "You would never be my adversary," He says to Lestat, "not you!" (MD 169). Before Lestat can make sense of this statement, Memnoch takes him away before he can respond. Memnoch says that he does not know God's origins. Indeed, he believes that God Himself is trying to discover this for himself by observing the evolution of his creation. The world, for God, is an experiment to determine what would have happened if He had once been matter. Matter thus came from God's own imagination. Memnoch believes that God never realized the consequences of his own actions. The key to God's concept is energy. "[W]hen energy transformed into matter, it became an interdependent circular exchange independent of God" (MD 177). This makes the world an independent entity beyond God's control.

God, however, eventually recalled Memnoch, who argued that human souls should be allowed access into Heaven. God sent him to Sheol to find ten worthy souls, but Memnoch returned with millions. God accepted them all. Next, Memnoch convinced Him to become flesh and participate in his own creation to gain an understanding of it. God, angered by this suggestion, cursed Memnoch to wander the Earth--although God eventually takes up the challenge. God, Himself, impregnated a young virgin and was born. Memnoch encountered God in the Palestinian desert where He told Memnoch His plan to teach humans the "awareness of Creation and the Understanding of its deliberate unfolding; an appreciation of its beauty and laws which makes possible an acceptance of suffering and seeming injustice and all forms of pain . . ." (MD 269). God explains that He plans to die on the cross to give suffering meaning and redeem the world.

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Happen to Good People which states that we must forgive God who has imperfections. One perspective Rice presents is that God created humanity in his own image so that he can gain knowledge into himself.

Because God and Christ are directly involved in this text, blood takes on an added symbolic significance. Lestat first takes blood from his victims that involve not only their life force but also their memories. When Lestat kills Roger, Lestat takes all Roger's memories. Lestat has received Roger's selfless love for his daughter Dora that gives Roger's life meaning (Smith 107). From the most powerful vampires, he takes blood that gives him wisdom. In Memnoch, Lestat takes blood from Christ, indicating Lestat has received the gift of eternal life. This blood, however, fails to protect Lestat from Hell. Finally, Lestat drinks Dora's menstrual blood that takes him back to the beginning of life and innocence along with redemption that does not involve sacrifice.

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Lestat fulfills his role in the divine game by giving Dora the veil. Knowing that it will revive the dying Christian religion, he realizes that he has sentenced millions to a repressive belief system that can only engender death and moral stagnation. Instead of seeing himself as a god, Lestat realizes that he is just an "[i]mmortal, material, earthbound vampire" (228). Refusing to take part in any more of God and the Devil's evil schemes, he vows never to kill again, drinking only Dora's menstrual blood, which symbolizes life without moral sacrifice. In the final book, he transforms from a devil into a philosopher trapped in a state of limbo. Lestat is left wandering the city streets pondering the incidents that he has experienced. He finally learns that ultimately neither humans nor vampires can understand the meaning of existence. With this knowledge, Lestat walks out of our lives forever.

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caught in mortal uncertainty in the guise of immortality. His role is over; his fate is not for us to know. Perhaps he will find another heir for another game and go into the flames like Magnus or simply wander the earth like Louis, falling into a nihilistic void. Whatever the case, the curtain falls on the final act, leaving the audience to ponder what has been presented on the great fictional stage. All that remains for both Lestat and humanity is the savage garden.

Chapter V

Lost in the Savage Garden:

Zarathustra Caught in the Grips of Fate in *Memnoch, the Devil*

He who binds himself to joy
Does the winged life destroy
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.

William Blake, "Eternity"

In the final *Vampire Chronicle* in Rice's original vampire series, Lestat is caught up in a scheme between God and the devil to reinvigorate Christianity in Memnoch the Devil. It's a different Lestat from the rest of the *Chronicles*. He tells his readers in the prologue to "Come with me. Just listen to me. Don't leave me," indicating that something horrendous has happened (*MD 1*). In the beginning, Lestat walks toward a victim, and in the end, he walks away from all victims. Events become complete and the tales that have been woven are finished. This story is a mix between Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Playing Virgil to Lestat's Dante, Memnoch guides Lestat through Heaven and Hell. In the end, Lestat is no longer his old self--he has seen too much. His newly found humanity makes him victim to the greatest con of all by creatures who call themselves Devil and God in a plan to revive Christianity.

The devil apparently has been a constant force throughout the Chronicles. In *Interview with the Vampire* and *Queen of the Damned*, the devil may exist just below the surface. In *The Vampire Lestat*, *Tale of the Body Thief*, and *Memnoch, the Devil* the devil makes an actual appearance. In the Vampire Lestat, the devil may take the form of Magnus who is described as a deeply lined, smiling white face at Renaud's House of Thespians where Lestat is performing. While waiting for Lestat, he plays with victims, keeping them in a pen symbolizing how life is really out of our control. This shows that evil is always around us.

Creatures that may be God and the devil actively pursue Lestat. This begins when the Devil, impersonating Roger's ghost, provides the initial contact with Dora Flynn, an evangelist who can publicize a religious icon. The Devil plays with Lestat by stalking him as the vampire pursues his victims. In addition, the Devil takes on the name Memnoch, perhaps illustrating the flippant nature of these supernatural beings who take pleasure in playing games in the mortal realm. He requests that the vampire help him save humanity from an evil God who causes humans unnecessary suffering. So that he can make his point, Memnoch requests that Lestat accompany him from Heaven to Hell. Setting up the rules, Memnoch cautions, "it's terribly important that you see everything

before you make up your mind” (168). This gives both him and God time to set Lestat up. The devil reintegrates Nietzsche’s argument that Christian evil that has been perpetuated throughout history. Lestat, in this story, becomes easy prey to his own preconceptions.

David Talbot, however, is their first intended victim. While sitting in a Paris café after the war, David tells Lestat that he saw God and the Devil having a conversation in human form. Satan was telling God that he was sick of doing evil deeds. God, however, reassured him that his role was vital in the universe. The Devil, David realizes, is a good friend of God’s and that the world is simply an experiment. This leads him to the conclusion that the devil can change and that God is imperfect. It appears God incorporated His own flaws into the universe, which He made through simple cell division. David concludes that they wanted him to witness their conversation. Instead of pursuing some course of action, he simply was led by others to doubt his vision. When Lestat asks the devil about his purpose for David, Memoch tells him that it is unimportant because Lestat is “the one that [the devil] wants now” (*MD* 168).

Rice’s devil is one in a long line of literary creations of Satan. The Satan in *Paradise Lost* is most well-known. Milton shows that the misuse of free will given to the angels and to humankind was the cause of all subsequent punishment and disaster. Dante’s *Inferno* presents an alternative picture. He is without magnificence or aggression. The evil which he portrays is a true horror, the negation of all creativity and life-giving force. After standing up to God, Lucifer’s

body falls head-first from Heaven and plunges through the earth to its center, where he remains immobile, head downwards, trapped in frozen ice.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "Ethan Brand" (1850) may provide important insights into why Lestat has become a target. The main character in the story has done unspeakable things to a local girl and has reached an understanding with the Devil as Lestat did in *Tale of the Body Thief*. The unpardonable sin, however, involves the sin of intellectual pride that results in the undertaking of the search for the Unpardonable Sin. The overweening ambition turns Brand's heart to stone. Brand believes that this quest would serve humanity and bring him some form of reward and satisfaction. Like Brand, curiosity and pride blinded Lestat. And Brand like Lestat could only return to his starting place and destroy himself by leaping into the inferno that inspired his nocturnal meditations on evil (Ramsland, VC 125).

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remains for both Lestat and humanity is the savage garden.

Aftermath

Final Pieces to the Puzzle in the

New Vampire Chronicles

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Act IV. 1.

As it was in the beginning, it is at the end. *The Vampire Chronicles* begin with the death of Louis' mortal brother Paul and end with the mortal Dora who gives the world the miracle of Veronica's veil. In between, over two-hundred years of immortal history transpired to bring these events to fruition, events that were generated under the guidance of higher beings. This required the manipulation of the modern Dionysus Lestat who first traveled to Paris, then to

New Orleans, and back again in search for answers that led him nowhere. The answer perhaps exists inside Lestat through his personal growth and understanding that there is no more than flesh, hence flesh must instruct the mind regardless of where it may lead because ultimately we cannot control our intended destiny. This is, perhaps, the greatest lesson a reader can glean from a nihilistic reading of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*.

Rice's study of nihilism through vampires did not end with *The Vampire Chronicles*. *Pandora*, *The Vampire Armand*, and *Vittorio the Vampire* continue the series. In *The Vampire Armand*, Armand begins his story by providing clues about what happened to Lestat in *Memnoch, the Devil* by discussing the story of Isaac and the demons. The demons fooled Lestat like Isaac by coming to him in the form of beautiful angels and pretending to be Christ. Memnoch taunted Lestat when it became clear that Lestat had fallen for their tricks. After this occurred, Isaac lay withdrawn from the world for two years like Lestat in his "Endymion" state.

The Vampire Armand also contains important symbolism that relates to the nihilistic interpretation. One of them is the "Monastery of the Caves," a group of monks that Armand considered joining in his youth. This symbol stands for Plato's allegory of the cave that pictures an underground cave with its mouth open toward the light of a blazing fire where people in the cave are chained so they cannot move. Consequently, the cave wall directly in front of them illuminated by the light of the fire casts shadows on the wall. To cave dwellers,

the shadows are reality. The cave stands for the world of appearances and the journey outside is the ascent to knowledge. Before becoming a dark angel, Armand saw illusions until he dared to step outside the monastery cave and see another version of reality. Yet, he realizes that the illusions themselves have value.

From the beginning of the Chronicles, music has been an essential element. The key to understanding *The Vampire Armand* is found in Beethoven's "Appassionata" that recapitulates many themes found in the Vampire Chronicles such as the eternal despair of living in a meaningless universe. Rice maintains that "music is an attempt to organize madness" (Salon 99). Sybelle, Armand's new human companion, plays this piece repeatedly because "it summed up her grief and her pain, and she forfeited all ambition and action just to play this piece" (Ramsland VC 34). Armand says that if he could title the book, it would be called "Symphony for Sybelle," meaning that he would give humanity a new song that escapes pain (VA 359). Armand, like so many others, however, ultimately fails. The novel ends with Sybelle beginning to play the tune again continuing the truth of the piano's immortal cry. Humanity will thus continue to chant the song of immortal pain.

Part two of this novel is titled "The Bridge of Sighs," after a seventeenth century Venetian bridge that received its name because men who passed through the bridge on their way to the prison on the other side would see the beautiful lagoon before being imprisoned. This section relates Armand's failure in

finding meaning in his relationships with Lestat, Louis, and Claudia. "The Bridge of Sighs" is also the title of a modern song sung by Robin Tower which discusses the "cold," "unfeeling" nature of God who hides from humanity. Armand maintains that the greatest curse is loneliness instead of being damned, which includes alienation from God.

Marius plays the role of the Christian God in the novel and may be seen as a symbol of God throughout the entire *Vampire Chronicles*. Marius' nature is clear in how he is described. Armand sees him as "a great magician" whom everyone endeavors not to anger. While watching Marius paint or undertake the act of creation, Armand calls this a "monstrous" spectacle (79). Marius questions his love for Armand and his very nature, showing that he is as uncertain of himself as David believed him to be. Continually, Marius is called "master" in the text. Pandora notes that she fears Marius more than anyone.

Pandora, in contrast, is about hope that remains even though nihilism plagues the present world. Like the goddess Pandora, she opens the box that brings human calamities but drops the lid before hope can flee. This tells people hope is never lost even if the universe lacks meaning. Marius tells her that she will "never become part of this old tale that goes on verse by verse no matter how the world changes" (*VP* 203). This theme is introduced at the beginning of the text when Pandora questions why Armand goes into the sun after seeing the veil even though he knew that Veronica's Veil was unauthentic. Pandora means "all gifts." She calls reason "consciousness within a void" (28). Marius criticizes

Pandora for entertaining contemporary religion that springs up in the Roman Empire because its reliance on emotion was dangerous. She, in turn, criticizes him for looking to meaningless history books to glean meaning out of human existence.

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Vittorio is the final book in this series and provides the final pieces to the puzzle. Vittorio appears to be named after Alfieri Vittorio, an eighteenth-century Italian tragic poet who wanted to create a uniquely Italian tragic tradition. Vittorio quite deliberately breaks with the original *Vampire Chronicles* :

I have, however, nothing whatsoever to do with the "Coven of the Articulate," that band of strange romantic vampires in and from the Southern New World city of New Orleans who have regaled you already with so many chronicles and tales. (V 3)

This is essential because it proves that the *Chronicles* were never about vampires, but about humanity. The uniqueness is a tale about human existence in light of nihilism.

The story behind the *Vampire Chronicles* is as old as the tradition of vampires themselves. It's about the meaning of human existence. Throughout the ages, philosophers have asked themselves the age-old question: "What does it all mean?" Rice's work provides no answer except perhaps the unsettling notion that everyone must find their own meaning in the chaotic world in which they live. Her writing indicates that nihilism is an infection that has the ability to destroy as well as liberate. The search for meaning will ultimately go regardless if such an inquiry is good or bad. No matter how many books Rice adds to the *Vampire Chronicles*, the conclusion will remain the same. Like all other individuals throughout the ages, the door is closed and we are left out in the cold.

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